



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TDM

1. **Does there have to be a full time facilitator? (Can't we just add this to someone's current job responsibilities?)**

TDM requires the ability to immediately provide a facilitated meeting when an emergency removal has occurred or is about to occur. It also demands a facilitator with a great deal of skill in managing complex, often emotional meetings, and a person who can devote their full and objective attention to the issues at hand. For these reasons, a full time facilitator who is a member of the public agency's staff is necessary.

2. **What qualifications should the facilitator have/what level of staff?**

The agency must have the ability to select the facilitator(s) based on skills and experience. The facilitator should ideally be the agency's "best and brightest": a person who has had much experience in frontline child welfare social work, and who is respected by his/her peers for the experience. Many agencies position the facilitator job at just below the supervisory level.

3. **Should the facilitator be outside the assigned SW's chain of command?**

Absolutely.

4. **What kind of training does a facilitator need to do the job?**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family to Family technical assistance team provides a 5-day facilitator training curriculum to all new F2F sites. It is a skills-based approach with a strong emphasis on the core values of F2F and TDM, and plenty of opportunity to practice.

5. **How does TDM differ from Family Group Conferencing (e.g. the New Zealand model)?**

TDM shares nearly identical underlying values with FGC and similar approaches-values such as family empowerment, inclusivity of participants, and a strengths/needs focus.) It differs primarily in the purpose (to make a placement-related decision) and timing (it must occur prior to the decision, or in the case of emergencies, prior to the court hearing.)

6. **How can this really be good for families if there often isn't time to prepare, time to ensure all involved parties are able to attend, and time to 'nurture' the family during a longer meeting?**

TDM provides the family with a voice in EVERY placement-related decision their children face; that is something the system has never before guaranteed, and even when the meeting is held under less than ideal conditions, it is a respectful and positive activity.

7. **How much time should we plan on for each TDM meeting?**

1-2 hours

8. **How do you get the community people to the table?**

First, new partnerships must be forged (in many, if not most systems.) Child welfare must reach out to potential community partners in new ways and offer new approaches for sharing its work. Including representatives of the families' own communities to participate in the critical decision-making meetings those families are a part of is a compelling way to underline the invitation to partnership. F2F sites have explored numerous strategies to make this happen, including contracting with neighborhood collaboratives and supporting the development of community-

based networks of volunteers who serve on a rotation basis to attend meetings for families from their neighborhoods.

9. Can we promise confidentiality of the proceedings to participants?

Not completely. It is recommended that the meetings be framed in terms of respect, privacy, and sensitivity rather than confidentiality. Families are told that information may need to be shared outside of the meeting for case planning purposes, in litigation, or if a new allegation of abuse or neglect surfaces.

10. What are the pros & cons of having agency attorneys attend? How about outside attorneys? GAL?

Legal and social work professionals may both gain in their knowledge of each others' field if attorneys participate in TDM. At times, lawyers may be able to clear up confusing issues, and social workers may be able to enlighten attorneys about matters of risk, safety and permanency. On the other hand, many participants may not be comfortable speaking freely in the presence of lawyers, and some lawyers may use the meeting as an opportunity for pre-trial discovery. GALs, whether or not they are attorneys, are charged with the responsibility to advocate for the child's best interests and not simply to take sides; therefore it is recommended that they be included in all TDM meetings.

11. Who should make the decision if the group can't reach consensus? Is there an appeal process if someone in the group really objects to the final decision?

If the entire group cannot reach consensus, the facilitator will attempt to bring at least the agency's staff to a decision that all can support. If there is disagreement even among agency staff, the facilitator will ask the family's assigned social worker to make the decision. At that point, other agency staff have the opportunity to request a review of the decision from a designated, high level administrator within the agency. That person's decision on behalf of the public agency then becomes the agency's official position.

12. What if one of the parents (or their support people) is believed to be mentally ill or violent?

Automatic exclusions of meetings for families with particular problems should be avoided as much as possible. When s/he schedules the meeting, the social worker should alert the facilitator to any known concerns regarding family violence or other potentially dangerous issues, and the facilitator can make provisions to ensure safety (such as having security personnel on call, or even excluding a particularly dangerous person.) If these concerns arise only after the meeting is underway, the facilitator and other meeting participants must utilize their best skills and judgment to determine if a meeting should be terminated, a participant excused, or security personnel contacted.

13. How do we get everyone to the table so quickly (i.e. pre-removal decision or the next working day after an emergency removal)?

The agency should have a strong infrastructure in place so that the individual social worker need not create a "new meeting" each time a TDM is required. A single point of contact receives the call requesting the meeting; that person arranges for the facilitator, the meeting room, and as many invitations as are feasible. S/he also schedules the meeting time, and provides all of these details to the requesting social worker immediately when the worker calls. Once it becomes known in the community that the agency holds these meetings as part of its everyday practice, external participants will anticipate last minute invitations and make provisions to be on call for emergency meetings. The value of providing such meetings to families becomes apparent to participants and outweighs their objections to being inconvenienced.

- 14. Is it possible to have the crisis worker who placed the child at the table on a next-day meeting? What about labor management issues/grievances if this requires them to work outside of normal shifts?**

In many systems, it is not possible. The person who accepts the hand-off of the after-hours case should participate and share as much information as s/he can about the circumstances of the removal.

- 15. How does TDM help with identifying kin for placement & support?**

During the TDM discussion of safe options and alternatives, a discussion with family members in attendance often leads to a much broader picture of the family's kinship network. Even if few family members are present, the team focuses on exploring all known kin and makes it a priority of completing the family assessment to identify all branches of the family tree.

- 16. If TDM is about the decision itself, how much case plan development can actually occur at the meeting?**

That depends. At the very least, TDM emphasizes connecting parents with their most pressing service need before they leave the table. However, given the limited time and often emergent circumstances of the meeting, in-depth case planning is not a primary goal of most TDM meetings.

- 17. How can safety and risk assessment information be incorporated into the TDM meeting? Doesn't it intimidate families to talk about safety and risk issues in this setting?**

A thorough discussion of risk and safety concerns, as well as the family's strengths and needs, is a part of every TDM meeting. If a safety/risk assessment tool is part of the social worker's assessment process, then s/he is expected to highlight the findings, however preliminary they may be, as part of the discussion. Facilitators assist in ensuring that safety and risk concerns are described in lay language, not jargon, and that clear connections are made between behaviors of concern and their resulting risks to children.

- 18. How does the staff typically react to this change? What union issues can we expect?**

At first many staff resist the idea of TDM. They fear that it will be a time drain, or that it will supplant their own professional judgment about a case. Other staff welcome TDM as a way of ensuring that they will not stand alone on particularly tough decisions about removal and reunification. As TDM becomes a regular part of their practice, most staff come to view it as a supportive and potentially time-saving tool which often assists in connecting families to new, community-based services and broadens the range of ideas for strengthening those families.

- 19. Should children be included in the meetings? What age?**

This should always be a case by case decision. However, for youth in their teens it should be presumed that participating TDM meetings provides an important vehicle for "voice and choice" which should only be denied under extenuating circumstances.

